

**STRATEGY
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**DEFINING TRENDS AFFECTING THE NATIONAL
SECURITY OF THAILAND FROM 1996 TO 2006**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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In the Post-Cold War Era, there are two major uncertainties in Southeast Asia. The first is the extent to which U.S. will engage itself in Asia-Pacific stability. The second uncertainty is the true intentions of the PRC in its relation with the Southeast Asia states. While uncertainties exist, the Southeast Asia states are undergoing changes in their economies, politics, and security. Factors that induced changes include a reduction of political conflicts, the primacy of economic considerations in international relations and how economic interdependence shapes the inter-states conflicts, the emerging PRC economy, the rapid growth of the middle class, and the increasing roles of Non-Governmental Organizations and Private-Volunteered Organizations in international security issues. These uncertainties and the changing environment facing Southeast Asia have brought about trends which affect the national security of Thailand.

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE REGION

Southeast Asia is a subregion of Asia, bounded by the Indian subcontinent, China, the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean. In 1990, the estimated population of Southeast Asia was 442.5 million. The region has 10 states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. There is much diversity in the cultures, history, religious, and ethnic groups among the Southeast Asia states. During World War II, this region became the a battle area between Japanese and Allied forces, and throughout the '60s and the '70s there were widespread and intensive struggles between communist and non-communist factions in most of the region.

In 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand established the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), the aims of which are to promote regional co-operation and coordination in economic, political, social, and cultural developments. Brunei and Vietnam later jointed ASEAN.

After the end of Cold War, the perception that the U.S. engagement and military presence in the region is likely to be significantly reduced before the end of this decade has caused uncertainty. There are many questions of regional security in this period of uncertainty such as the potential threat from China, the potential conflicts in the South China Sea, the unity of ASEAN, the economic dominance in international relations, and the demands for a more open political system. These questions play a critical role for the Southeast Asia states in keeping regional stability.

2. THAILAND'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

There is a noticeable difference in expression of national interests between the developed countries and developing countries. While national interests of developed countries, with their stable societies, have been normally articulated in relation to the external environment, the national interests of developing countries, as Thailand, are focused on both internal security and the external environment.

The national interests of Thailand can be identified as vital and important interest.

a. Vital Interests

- 1) Protection of Thai territory.
- 2) Protection of the national democratic regime and the institution of kingship.

b. Important Interests

- 1) Preservation of a national religion and good cultures.
- 2) Promotion of free markets.
- 3) Promotion of multilateral economic cooperation.
- 4) Access to markets.
- 5) Promotion of regional stability.
- 6) Sustainment of the national image in the international community.

3. FACTORS AFFECTING THAILAND'S INTERESTS IN THE REGION

a. Defense Trends

- 1) Since Myanmar's military junta, which was named the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took power in

1988, the Myanmar Army has played the most prominent roles in fighting ethnic insurgent groups which are the minority groups-- the Karen, Mon, Shan, Kachin, and other groups-- which have fought for each ethnic state autonomy, since the country regained its independence in 1948. Besides, it has dominated the political and economic processes in the country. Before 1988, the Myanmar Army was mainly a light infantry force organized, equipped, and deployed for internal security operations. With forty years of experience in struggle against a number of insurgent groups, it has gained a combat reputation as a tough, skilled force in jungle warfare. Since 1962 Myanmar accepted military aid reluctantly, because of its non-alignment foreign policy, and its economy has been stagnant. The consequence of these circumstance prevented Myanmar from any major military modernization programs. By 1988 the Army's heavy equipment, such as utility trucks, tanks, and artillery was obsolete, and the logistic and command and control systems were weak. When the SLORC took power, it made a decision to expand and to modernize the armed forces which was mainly focused on the Army.

China has a special relationship with Myanmar, during the time that both countries have been condemned for violent cracking down on the pro-democracy movements and China delivered lots of military weapons and equipment to Myanmar. Though its close relationship with Myanmar, China has obtained the opportunity access to markets and the expansion of other influences southward toward the Indian Ocean. Since 1988 Myanmar

has procured a number of the Chinese rifles, antitank weapons, night vision devices, mortars, artillery pieces, multiple rocket launchers, several kinds of utility trucks, air defense weapons, and communication equipment. The Myanmar Army has also increased its armored warfare capabilities when it bought about 185 light and medium tanks, 250 armored personnel carriers, and some armored launch bridge vehicles and tank recovery vehicles from China. Concurrently, from 1988 to 1995 the personal strength of the Myanmar Army has grown from about 170,000 to more than 300,000.¹ With increasing number of personnel, new weapons, more ammunition, greater mobility, and more communication equipment, the Myanmar Army now must be considered as a formidable force. It demonstrated the benefits of forces expansion and modernization by being able to conduct concurrent operations against ethnic groups along the western and eastern borders of the country in the early 1990s. The Myanmar troops also succeeded in offensive operations between 1994 and 1995 against the Mon camp on Halokhani, the Karen strongholds of Manerplaw and Kawmura, and the Mong Tai Army of the well known drug warlord Khun Sa.

However, the later three operations of the Myanmar Army have caused an additional flow of the refugees into Thailand. There have been about 80,000 Burman, Mon, and Karen refugees inside Thai border² and there were many times that foreign armed groups which were previously in the same ethnic group fled into Thailand, infiltrated across the Thai border and attacked either some of the refugee's leaders or Thai officials.³

In the recent years, when the Myanmar Army conducted suppressive operations against ethnic insurgent groups close to the Thai border, Thailand has increased awareness and prepared to deal with the problems of new incoming refugees, any foreign armed groups which will infiltrate the Thai border, and any border security issues which would escalate the tendency of an armed crash between both countries, if the problems are mishandle.

In addition, The Myanmar Army has significantly improved its capabilities to struggle against the ethnic insurgent groups. Its ground force, which now is one of the largest ground forces in Southeast Asia, is also be able to operate in a wider range and a longer duration in conventional warfare. Myanmar's neighbors have been closely watching the growth of the Myanmar armed forces.

2) At the end of 1978 the Vietnamese force, supported by Soviet Union, launched an invasion of Cambodia. The Vietnamese removed Pol Pot's Cambodian government, formed by the Khmer Rouge, and replaced it by a more moderate ex-Khmer Rouge led by Heng Samrin and Hun Sen. The ousted Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot and strongly supported by China, has controlled areas along the border with Thailand and kept on an insurgency against the Vietnamese-sponsored government.

The post Cold War significantly contributed to the international community is capacity and willingness to resolve the Cambodian conflict which has threatened regional stability, but Cambodia continued to deteriorate severely economically and

socially. In 1990 the members of the UN Security Council agreed on the establishment of a United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), the most comprehensive and the most expensive peace operation in the UN history.⁴ The UNTAC had a role in verifying the withdrawal of foreign troops, the disarmament of all Cambodian forces, and in organizing and supervising free elections. In October 1991, in negotiations held in Paris, all the Cambodian factions reached a final consensus on those agreements.

In 1992 the Khmer Rouge did not allow UNTAC troops into the areas it controlled and also refused to participate in the scheduled election which was the important step to restoring peace in Cambodia. However, the UN determined to continue proceeding with its mandates. The election was held under UN supervision in May 1993; the National Front for an Independent, Neutral Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), led by one of King Sihanouk's son Prince Narodom Ranariddh, won 46 percent and the Cambodian People's Party which led by Hun Sen, a Prime Minister of the Vietnamese-installed government, got 38 percent of the vote. The Cambodian assembly met and came up with a new constitution, establishing a constitutional monarchy. The government was formed as a coalition government by an unusual power-sharing arrangement and Prince Narodom Ranariddh became the first prime minister and Hun Sen second prime minister.

The UNTAC departed after the new Cambodian government was set up, but the capability of that government to rebuild and

to develop the nation has been limited by the division within the coalition government itself and between the government and the Khmer Rouge that still controls a large area of the country. Policy differences over how to deal with the Khmer Rouge have undermined the government's ability to pursue a single coordinated national strategy. The alternatives of reconciliation as well as elimination have their arguments among the Cambodian authorities. In July 1994 the national parliament passed legislation outlawing the Khmer Rouge, reducing the option of formal talks between the coalition government and the Khmer Rouge.

The Cambodian conflict now is an insurgency dilemma and most of the problem lies within the country. With a fragile government and an ill economy, the future resolution to end the conflict remains a difficult one. Therefore, the fighting between both sides will continue and will affect the stability of Thai border with Cambodia. Border conflicts between Cambodia and Thailand may occur when the Cambodian government's forces pursue retreating Khmer Rouge forces and cross the Thai border.

3) The territorial dispute over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, which are claimed by the Peoples Republic of China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei, has the potential to cause regional instability. With the exception of Brunei, all the claimants have set up garrisons in the Spratlys,⁵ and some of them unilaterally have offered the leasing of concessions to foreign oil companies. More

complicating, the dispute has affected not only all the claimants, but has also destabilized the international seaborne trade because the Spratlys area is close to the major sea lines of communication through the South China Sea.

Since five of the claimants are the member of ASEAN, ASEAN has urged all the claimant states to exercise self-restraint and to explore joint cooperation in the concerned areas of national resources while they set aside the issue of sovereignty. ASEAN also has urged that the claimants should apply the principles of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, which calls for the renunciation of the use of force in dealing with issues and resolution of all disputes by peaceful means. The general agreement from informal workshops on the use of peaceful means to settle disputes and joint cooperation in development without prejudice to territorial claims has been included in the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea. The effectiveness of this approach will depend much on the unity of ASEAN.

However, it seems that the dispute over the Spratly Islands has caused the claimants to increase their military capabilities which in turn will bring about increase in military procurement in the nearby countries.

b. Economic Trends

1) The end of the Cold War has made international tensions of political ideologies less pressing to many countries and promoted the belief that economies would now dominate

international relationship. Most countries are emphasizing its international trade and commerce instead of conflict between states. Economic competition in the international relation has increased and given rise to forms of economic regionalism which offer an individual country the approach of responding to uncertainty by balancing between economic interdependence and national security. By combining forces, many countries could enhance their collective efforts and increase their gains from global economic interdependence. Some of the major regional economic integration movements are: in Europe the European Union (EU) which treaty was signed in 1991; in North America the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which was established in 1993, and in the Asia-Pacific region the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which had its first summit in 1993.

In 1992 the ASEAN countries realized that their economies are drawn into the market processes through regional economic integration. The need to strengthen and improve its economic cooperation has become imperative for the relevance of ASEAN. There are two major forms of intra-ASEAN economic cooperation. The first is the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) which is a preferential arrangement among the ASEAN members, providing measures to liberalize and increase intra-ASEAN trade and to attract more extra-ASEAN investments. Starting from 1993, AFTA has been a gradual process extending over a 15 year period. The second form has been known as "subregional economic zones." These represents closer economic cooperation and bring together a

geographically contiguous area with two or more countries. ASEAN now has at least four such areas: the Singapore-Johor-Riau (SIJORI) triangle; the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT); the East Asian Growth Area (EAGA) involving Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines; and the growth quadrangle consisting of China's Yunnan province, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. In addition to contributing to regional economic growth and development, AFTA and its subregional economic zones has led to the prospect of regional stability by reducing the potential for traditional ethnic tension, political rivalries, and territorial disputes in the region.

ASEAN also envisaged that AFTA should be an extra-regional or outward oriented arrangement as well as an intra-regional integration. An excessive arrangement which facilitates intra-regional economic links tends to distort the intention away from an objective of promoting global trade liberalization, and the pattern of ASEAN intra-regional trade still remains limited in scope and can not create a high level of regional economic interdependence. ASEAN trade and resource flows will continue to be close linked with Japan; the four East Asian Newly Industrialized Economies (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan); the People's Republic of China (PRC); North America; and Europe. Thus, it is necessary that ASEAN has to find ways to sustain and promote its economic linkages with extra-regional trading partners.

In the Asia-Pacific region, APEC was formed in 1989,

with the notion that it is an informal inter-governmental process to promote economic cooperation in the region. APEC is still not a regional grouping, but it is more like an economic forum advocating regional trade liberalization and more open regionalism.⁶ Example of APEC trade liberalization measures are an enhanced exchange of information on trading patterns; increased transparent policies of trade and investment; harmonization of policies, regulations, and standards; and non-discrimination in lowering of tariffs or barriers to labor and capital movement.⁷ APEC has a secretariat and annual ministerial meetings. At the meeting in Indonesia in 1994, APEC leaders adopted the Bogor Declaration setting up a free trade area within APEC before 2020.

ASEAN nations have recognized the importance of APEC in intra- and extra-ASEAN economic interaction, but are cautious about the integrating processes lead into APEC institutionalization. They have fears that the vast organization, the various disparities in income, and the differences in technological level among APEC members could bring about asymmetrical dependence and domination by the larger economies. Thus, ASEAN prefers proceeding gradually toward the APEC institutionalization.

2) The emerging PRC economy, which has experienced rapid growth in recent years and represents the world's third-largest economy,⁸ has been firmly integrated with the Asia-Pacific economies since the PRC declared its economic reform in 1978.

With its large market and vast resource base, the integration of the PRC economy into the Asia-Pacific region will further promote the growth potential of the region. In terms of intra-regional trade in 1993, Asia-Pacific region absorbed 51 percent of PRC total exports.⁹ There have been increasing investment flows in the region because the growing Asia-Pacific economies, including the PRC economy, are open and outward oriented. The emerging PRC economy will be a positive factor in hastening more viable Asia-Pacific economic interdependence.

Economic relations between PRC and ASEAN countries have roots deriving from history and geography. With close economic cooperation, the PRC and the ASEAN countries have reduced the gap in their economies and societies. In the wide range of primary commodities, the Chinese economy and the ASEAN countries' economies are complementary with each other. When both sides approach to more industrialization, they become economic competitors among themselves. However, the recent development of bilateral economic relationships between PRC and individual ASEAN countries have shown that such competitions have not obstructed the economic growth of the PRC or the ASEAN states.

3) The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea led to the creation of a new maritime tradition extending the coastal state jurisdiction over resources in an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles. The implication of this convention has caused many Southeast Asia countries, which are almost all maritime nations, to improve their naval forces to

enhance maritime security and protect resources in the expanded offshore zones. The growth of these naval forces and overlapping of claimed EEZs will tend to induce inter-states tensions.

Organized criminal groups and international terrorist organizations can also endanger the maritime resources if the government does not have enough maritime capability to deal with the threats.

In addition to EEZ conflicts in the South China Sea, there are the overlapping EEZs between Thailand and its neighbors in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. ASEAN can provide alternatives for a peaceful resolution among the involved nations in the overlapping EEZ, but the uncertainty of the strategic environment, the growth of transnational organized criminal groups and international terrorist groups still demand that Thailand improves its maritime forces.

c. Political Trends

1) During the Cold War, major power nations-- the United States, the former Soviet Union, and the PRC-- had greatly influenced the foreign policies of developing countries in Southeast Asia. The inter-state relations in the region at that time were divided into two groups by political ideologies. The first group contained those the ASEAN countries which have been pro-democracy, and the second group comprised those countries (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) in Indochina Peninsular and Myanmar which leaned away from democracy.

When the Cold War ended, the international tensions of

these political ideologies have substantially declined, and economies have become more important in international relationship. The Southeast Asia Countries now have an unrestricted freedom in forming their external political policies in relation to other countries. With an economic-driven environment and the requirement of maintaining regional stability, the ASEAN countries have realized that confidence building through good relations with the Indo-China countries and Myanmar are as important as a healthy relationship with major powers.

2) In the last few years the ASEAN countries have been faced with a new domestic political challenge. Their achievements in economic growth led to the emergence of a growing middle class that demands more political participation. Thus, the political system in those countries have to become more open to the variety of interest groups in their societies. The demands for openness will continue to increase as long as the economy grows. The successes of the ASEAN countries in meeting these demands will depend on the ability of each member to adopt the suitable political system, rely on a responsible government, strong political parties, high quality of the politicians, and the proper development of civil society. However, the adoption of a political system must be balanced with national values in order to maintain internal stability and relevance as each ASEAN country becomes a player into global economic interdependence.

3) Increasing global economic and political interaction,

trends in international relations today concerned with democratization, human rights, and the environment issues tend to accept roles not only states but also organized groups which are Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Private-volunteered Organizations (PVOs). Each government needs to develop a role which can enhance the interaction with the many NGOs and PVOs that act independently and beyond the control of any country.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve the desired future conditions, Thailand should pursue the following policies:

a. Promote close cooperation with the other ASEAN states, so ASEAN can contribute more effectively to the regional stability of Southeast Asia and to the intra-ASEAN economic cooperation.

b. Promote friendship in international relations without regard to political ideologies, particularly with the Indo-China countries and Myanmar. This effort facilitates neighbored countries for a confidence building which is required before the involved countries can generate their mutual interests.

c. Promote the growth of national democracy through acknowledging the demands of the middle class providing them greater political participation, providing the lower class sufficient requisite education and the reasonable income distribution, and maintaining the internal political stability through the active support of the civilian government.

d. Prepare and engage in interactive processes with NGOs and PVOs both in domestic and in external issues.

e. Change the current Nation Military Strategy that is based on deterrence, total defense, and fighting combined to a strategy which consists of peacetime engagement, deterrence and conflict prevention, fighting with total forces, and fighting combined.

f. Adjust military force structure based on the required capabilities. However, the current force should be maintained as much as the national economy can afford, and that forces must be primarily focused on combat readiness rather than modernization.

g. Each military services will receive their fair share in improving their capabilities.

h. Military operational doctrine must be emphasized on joint and combined operations and in the firm integration of civil defense into all operations.

ENDNOTES

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⁴Stephen J. Randall, " Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era: the United Nations and the Cambodian Elections of 1993," Contemporary Security policy 16, no.2 (1995): 177.

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⁹Wong, 624.

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